

216 EMILE ZOLA, NOVELIST AND
REFORMER

Victor Hugo's "Le Hoi s'anmse " (November 23, 1882), novels were always the same thing over and over again; and it would only be possible to take an interest in the writing of them if one could invent a new form. Personally his great desire was an opportunity to produce a play, one really all his own. In a word he was as stage-struck as ever, and it seemed unlikely that he would feel content until he had given the world an acknowledged dramatic masterpiece.

That comparative disregard for the work for which one is best fitted, that craving to excel in something else, and to be praised for it, has appeared in many men, in various degrees and ways. There was Thackeray, who always longed to see his drawings commended; there was Ingres, who courted more applause for his proficiency as a violinist than for his gifts as a painter.

At the opening of the Salon of 1883, Zola lunched with Daudet and Goncourt; and Daudet unbosoming himself, as was often his wont, solicited the advice of his friends as to whether he should offer himself as a candidate for the French Academy. Both Zola and G-oncourt urged him to do so, and there was no reason why they should have acted otherwise, for he had many chances in his favour. He occupied a high position as a novelist, and though nowadays

no thinking critic can place him in the same rank as Zola, he was at that time far more popular, for if, here and there, he had lampooned one or another individual in his books, he had never given anything like the offence which Zola had given in many directions.

It may be said, perhaps, that in 1883 Alphonse Daudet had reached the height of his reputation. In any case his best work was already done. His novel, " Le Nabab," pub-